

## Contemporary Muslim-Christian Interaction in Ivory Coast

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This qualitative study investigates a reality check of the interaction between Islam and Christianity in (Man) City, by investigating the level of peaceful coexistence among Muslims and Christians in (Man's) Ivory Coast.

**Methods:** The research used specific selection to provide concrete information to address the current situation among the citizens and to find suitable solutions to maintain peaceful coexistence among 3 religious groups: imams, pastors, and community members, chosen based on their experiences in the current coexistence situation.

**Results:** The findings indicated that the current interaction between Muslims and Christians has been amicable and warm and that both religion members live in peace and harmony, since President Ouattara was assigned in 2011, who established a good relationship between the two religions. It was also found that the participants view Christianity as the favorite religion of the government, while Muslims have the greater influence in the society.

**Conclusions:** The research concludes that Ivorian Muslims and Christians enjoy peaceful coexistence in harmony, tolerance and mutual respect. Religious dialogue plays some crucial roles in resolving disputes and misunderstandings. The study therefore, recommends that the government and the religious leaders need to create awareness so as to educate the citizens on the importance of peaceful religious coexistence in the society.

**Keywords:** Contemporary, interaction, Muslim, Christian, Ivory Coast.

### واقع التعامل المسلمي - المسيحي في كوت ديفوار

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### ملخص

**الأهداف:** تهدف هذه الدراسة النوعية إلى التحقق من واقع التعامل بين الإسلام والمسيحية في مدينة مان، من خلال التحقيق في مستوى التعايش السلمي بين المسلمين والمسيحيين بمان، كوت ديفوار.

**المنهجية:** استخدم البحث اختياراً محدداً لتوفير معلومات محددة لمعالجة الوضع الحالي بين المواطنين؛ ولإيجاد حلول مناسبة للحفاظ على التعايش السلمي بين ثلاث مجموعات دينية: الأئمة والقساوسة وأفراد المجتمع، تم اختيارهم بناءً على تجاربهم في التعايش الحالي.

**النتائج:** أشارت النتائج إلى أن وقع التعامل الحالي بين المسلمين والمسيحيين كان ودياً وداًفاً، وأن كلا الديانتين تعيشان في سلام وانسجام، منذ أن تولى الرئيس واتارا منصبه في عام 2011م الذي أقام علاقة جيدة بين الديانتين. وقد ظهر من نتائج وجهة نظر المشاركين أن المسيحية هي الديانة المفضلة لدى الحكومة، بيد أن للمسلمين تأثير أكبر في المجتمع.

**التوصيات:** خلص البحث إلى أن المسلمين والمسيحيين في كوت ديفوار يتمتعون بالتعايش السلمي في وئام وتسامح واحترام متبادل. ويلعب الحوار الديني بعض الأدوار الحاسمة في حل النزاعات وسوء التفاهم. لذلك أوصت الدراسة بضرورة قيام الحكومة والقادة الدينيين بخلق وعي من أجل توعية المواطنين بأهمية التعايش الديني السلمي في المجتمع.

**الكلمات الدالة:** واقع، التعامل، مسلم، مسيحي، كوت ديفوار

## Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is a French word; meaning the Elephant Coast. Ivory Coast is a part of the African continent that was named Côte d'Ivoire since the fifteenth century by European traders who moved around the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in search of elephants to collect ivory (the teeth of elephants) and then sell it in Europe and America. This country was recognized as one of the best trading areas in terms of the abundance of ivory elephants in the country (Younus 1989; Arna 2007). Ivory Coast is located in the center of northwestern Africa, with an area of 463,322 square kilometers. It is bordered to the north by Burkina Faso and Mali, to the west by Guinea Conakry and Liberia, to the east by Ghana, and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, with a coastline of 500 km (Bary & Karidiyatu 2007). Its political capital is Yamoussoukro, with a land area of about 3,500 km<sup>2</sup>, inhabited by approximately 355,573 people. Its economic capital is Abidjan, with a land area of 2,119 km<sup>2</sup>, 18 meters above sea level and has an estimated population of more than 5 million. The current total population of Ivory Coast - according to the projections of the latest World Population Review data November 19, 2021 - is 27,315,477 people. (WP Review 2021).

The Ivorian society is a multi-religious society, on top of which is Islam and Christianity, and with this religious duality in society, it shows through some social positions and exchanges the reality of the state of interaction between the two heavenly religions based on peaceful coexistence and good exchange. Based on that analysis, the idea of this research came after one of the researchers extrapolated the situation of Muslims and Christians through his personal experiences from 2000 to 2021. The (ISS, 2015) reported that: "The outbreak of the rebellion on 19 September 2002 led to the occupation of the north of the country, partitioning it into two distinct zones, with the south presented as 'Christian zone' and the north as 'Muslim zone', although this representation did not reflect the religious demographics of the country". This highlights the peaceful coexistence relationship between religions in Ivorian society. Islam is a flexible, divine religion that welcomes religious diversity in the neighborhood, cohabitation and citizenship in legislation and application, so the shadows of Islamic law apply to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This demonstrates a clear indication that differences in religion do not prevent peaceful coexistence between Muslims and other religions. Rather, the constitution of the Islamic religion, which is the Noble Qur'an, urges Muslims to deal and coexist well with non-Muslims, as Allah said: (Allah doesn't forbid you from being kind and just to those who didn't fight you for the sake of religion, nor expelled you from your homes. God loves the equitable) (*Surat Al-Mumtahina* verse 8).

War in Islam is not motivated by human desire. Therefore, fighting during the beginning of Islam was not legitimate, because fighting is not absurd, but its legitimacy is according to the need calling for it with the availability of its controls and requirements. The objectives of war in Islam are aimed at achieving truth, establishing justice, supporting the oppressed, restoring rights to their people, releasing human freedoms from their shackles, and preserving human dignity (Al-Sawafi, 2021). Therefore, it is incorrect to use Quranic verses concerning fighting against innocent people under the name of *Jihad* as some groups are doing and propagating nowadays. Al-Azzam conformed this by saying: "It is known to all sane people that *jihad*, which is fighting those who stand in the way of the call to Almighty Allah and the spread of the Islamic religion, is completely different in terms of its aims and objectives with what is called in our time terrorism, which is to intimidate the safe, frighten people and rob their freedoms without a legitimate right. Jihad aims to raise the Islamic beacon, remove obstacles to calling to God, and repel injustice from the oppressed" (Al-Azzam, 2020).

Basically, from the Quranic statement above it can be understood that Muslims are recommend to defend themselves from those who fight them, while it's forbidden by Islamic religion to fight or kill peaceful people. This idea had been clarified by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi explaining that: In fact, Islam was harsh with the polytheists of the Arabs -because they fight Muslims - and was lenient with the People of the Book (Christians) because they are closer to the Muslims in terms of revelation, prophet hood and the origin of the religion in general. Their affection for us has been legislated by the permissibility of eating their food, accompanying them, and treating them well because if they associate with us and get to know Islam in its environment and its people in its true form, in terms of knowledge, action and character, it will become clear to them that our religion is their religion in its sublime meanings, its most complete form, and its purest form, free from beginnings, ignorant, and idolatries (Al-Qaradawi, 2012).

This statement and the Quranic verse conformed the idea of freedom of belief and acceptance of religious diversity in Islam, it's also strong evidence upon which Ivorian Muslims should rely to establish peace and good interaction with Christians, and Non-Muslims in general in the society. This is so for that fact conflict and social violence are contrary to the objective of Islamic Shari'a, which aims to preserve the five necessities of life, namely: religion, soul, mind, honor and money. In fact, those things cannot be preserved without tolerance and peaceful coexistent relationship between religions. Undoubtedly, the objective of Islamic Shari'a is to achieve the interests of mankind, relieve them of hardship, and organize their lives in a suitable way to live in comfort and tranquility (Maroning & Sereme, 2020). That's the true image of Islam and Muslims as Al-Shatibi said: "The duties of Islamic Sharia are due to the preservation of its purposes, and these purposes do not exceed three sections: One of them: preserving the five necessities..." (Al-Shatibi, 1997). Hence, it is important to discuss about the contemporary Muslim- Christian interactions in Côte d'Ivoire.

#### **Statement of Problem:**

The situation of Muslims and Christians in Ivory Coast in the past era and present years is an issue which has drawn critical debates among researchers in the area of religious studies, in which some researchers believe that both religious communities are living in peace, and others think the opposite. This reveals that the thinking of both sides is a matter that needs to be clarified through scientific research in order to reach a good conclusion concerning current interaction between the two religion members in Ivorian society.

#### **Questions of the Study:**

The problem of this research appears by discussing to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference concerning the past and present interaction between Muslims and Christians in Ivory Coast?
2. What are Current Social activities between Muslims and Christians in the view of the experts?
3. What is the main reason for peaceful Coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Ivorian society in expert's view?

#### **Significance of the Study:**

This research might be important as it's trying to elaborate the main issue in Ivorian society, and provides the answer to the above questions, by clarifying the study problem. Its importance can be found as well on the other hand as it could add to research in this field of learning new information about the fact of Muslims and Christian's interaction in Ivory Coast through the true experience of the chosen experts, which can be a sample for other countries that are facing the similar situation.

#### **Research Aims**

As for the desired objectives of this study, they are summed up in the fact that this topic aims to show the reality of the interaction between the adherents of the two most common religions in Ivory Coast and to find suitable solutions in order to have peaceful coexistence among the two religions.

#### **Literature Review**

##### **The Reality of Muslim-Christian Interaction History in Ivory Coast**

The interaction between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Ivorian society appears through their social relations that bind them as one social element, it can be seen how the Ivorian society was affected by Islam in the northern regions of the country through the coexistence among tribes. The best example of this is the Sénoufo tribe, the pagan majority whose coexistence with the Jola tribes goes back to a long time. It is noticed that the people of these tribes have respect and appreciation for Islam and Muslims, so they celebrate with them on their holidays, and present them with gifts of sugar and other things in the month of Ramadan - as the custom. They also buy gifts for their family members on *Eid al-Fitr*, slaughter rams for them on *Eid al-Adha*, and even some of them wear their best clothes and go out to the prayer hall with Muslims without being Muslims themselves. They also adapt Islamic names for their children, such as: "Muhammad, Abdullah, Fatima, Amina, and others", without being Muslims. All of this is a result of good behavior and neighborliness between them, and in return we find Muslims respecting their rituals and customs as well, they are not subjected to insults and reprimands, and they present them with gifts on their occasions, and exchange friendly visits (Miran, 2000).

As for the rest of the regions, the reason for the influence of these areas by Islam was due to the mixing of the population of Muslim origins from neighboring countries with the citizens of the forested coastal areas, the beliefs of the community of these regions were between pagans and Christians, with the arrival of these foreign workers and traders; There was mixing and cooperation between local and expatriate citizens in farms and markets in a peaceful coexistence (Miran, 2000).

What crystallizes the influence of Islam on those regions in the current era? The researchers analyze and attribute those to the large number of mosques in the cities and villages, the emptiness of the cities, streets and markets of people on Muslim holidays, and the crowding of the streets on Fridays with passers who frequent the mosques to perform Friday prayer. Furthermore; The abundance of Arab Islamic schools as there is no city without Arab Islamic schools.

All the above factors and issues contributed to make Islam the dominant religion and more prevalent in Ivory Coast, equivalent to about 42 percent of religious people, according to 2014 estimates (Miran, 2007).

On other hand, the situation of interaction between Muslims and Christians in Ivory Coast was difficult due to complicated and aggressive coexistence during the period when the affairs of that land were under the government of French colonialist, and before the French colonizer occupied the Ivorian lands; Islam flourished in the north of the country with some other areas (Arna, 2007). Muslims at that time used to live with non-Muslims, who are traditional and spiritual, in peace and security, dealing with each other side by side, in terms of commercial exchange and various social life, with respect for the beliefs and principles of others, until the colonial rule overthrew them (Arna, 2007).

And when the French colonialism realized the absence of the Christian religion in the area called Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) today and the spread of Islam with a majority in the northern regions and a minority in other parts of the country, they discovered the seriousness of carrying Christianity to these areas, so that the process of Westernizing peoples and their Francization would not be limited to the cultural, economic and social aspect so that they could use Christian religion to complete the process of converting Ivorian people to French culture through Christianity. Hence came the encouragement of Catholic missionaries for all the actions of the colonizers on the grounds that the task for which they acted such actions towards Africans was justified. This encouragement carried the people of the region in general and Muslims in particular - who were suffering from the colors of humiliation, hatred of Islam, lack of recognition of it, ridicule and forced conscription and exorbitant taxes at the hands of the colonists - on adopting special attitudes towards Christianity and Christians (Ivory Coast history).

In August 07, 1960 when the country gained independence to manage its affairs politically, economically and militarily, by the father of the nation (Félix Houphouët-Boigny) who became the first President of the country, he worked hard to turn the page of tense coexistence situation between the Muslim and Christian community caused since the period of French colonial government, to a peaceful coexistence among the both communities.

Among the attempts made by the government of the President (Félix Houphouët-Boigny) and some other Presidents after him were to consolidate the unity of the population of the state, and spread the spirit of peaceful coexistence among beliefs in all aspects of the country in order for Ivorian people to accept cultural diversity from one another in the society.

Allocation of legal articles in the state constitution that stipulate the following laws (Ivorian constitution 2016):

1. The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire is one indivisible country, secular, democratic and social. Which ensures equality for all before the law without racial, ethnic, tribal, sexual or religious discrimination, and it respects all beliefs.
2. The people of Côte d'Ivoire should be aware of their freedom, national character, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and they are aware that union in light of this diversity guarantees economic development and a good social condition.
3. Any propaganda that aims or feels the elevation of one social sect over another is prohibited.

#### **Building Mosques and Churches:**

Even though President (Félix Houphouët-Boigny) in this regard made more effort in building churches than mosques, because he was a Catholic Christian, however, with the beginnings of the post-independence period, Muslims found a joyful improvement in their relations with the political community and the Christian community, as the president participated in building mosques in Abidjan the economic capital of the country, and in some cities, among those religious temples.

He built Saint Paul's Cathedral in the administrative district of Abidjan, to be a special temple for Catholic Christians, and Basilica of our Lady of Peace (Basillique notre dame de la paix), which was the largest church in the world at the time of its construction in 1985 (Perspective monde 1990). The purpose of building this church appears in the response of the President on its opening day, when an international journalist from Radio France asked him about the most important reasons that prompted him to build this project. He said: "Today there are three hundred and fifty million people in Africa, and among this number one hundred and fifty million are Muslims, while one hundred million of them are Catholic Christians, and in Côte d'Ivoire there are ten million people, 23% of whom are Muslims, and 15% of them are Catholics... Islam is an attack and it must be stopped, and the Christian that I am, Basilisk, our lady of peace, is my own way to stop the Islamic tide and it's spread in the south" (Jeune Afrique 1988). This speech made Muslim's people upset in that time, and in order to correct mistakes made by him he contributed in building some Mosques for Muslims community to bring back peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.

He built the Mosque of Riviera 2. in "Cocody" in Abidjan, and the total cost of the construction project was an estimated three hundred million francs, which is equivalent to today's ninety thousand European euros. He offered one hundred and eighty million Franc CFA, equivalent to five hundred and forty thousand European Euros, as a contribution from him to the realization of this noble project. And he explained that this amount that he gave was not from his pocket, but from the property of his deceased Muslim wife, but he made this contribution on her behalf so that she would have an ongoing charity that she would benefit from in her afterlife, as some scholars told him that the deceased benefits from ongoing alms in the Hereafter. (Kone, 2014).

In addition, The President also contributed in his personal capacity to the construction of mosques in Abidjan and many cities in the country, such as: the Great Mosque in the "Ajame" neighborhood in Abidjan, the grand Mosque of Yamoussoukro, the grand Mosque of Korogo city, as well as in the city of Bouake, Bonduko, and others regions (Kone, 2014).

#### **The Government's Recognition of the Muslim Holidays.**

Before the period of President (Félix Houphouët-Boigny) Muslim festivals such as: *Eid al-Fitr*, *Eid al-Adha*, *Laylat al-Qadir* and the Prophet's birthday, were not recognized by Ivorian government as official holidays of the state, like the Christian holidays. This occasion was a joyful one and happiness for Islamic nation in Côte d'Ivoire, where the holidays of Islam became a real reality for the Muslim employees who did not know rest during their religion festival days before that, while resting on Christian religion festival was considered as a holiday for all workers, this decision was taken by the government to undermine the patience of Muslims and imams as government pressurized to prevent the establishment of purely Islamic associations (Arna, 2007). However, Muslims' insistence in declaring that Islam is the majority among the religions in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as their quest to bring their Executive Council out of non-existence into existence, and God Almighty helped them in their endeavor, they were permitted to establish a council. This was a permission for the birth of what was known at that time as the National Islamic Council "Conseil National Islamique" (CNI) headed by Hajj Imam Idris Kone Quddus, and was recognized by the government on 01/09/1993(Arna, 2007).

#### **Creation of Muslim-Christian Dialogue Committee**

The nature of the Ivorian community, consisting of Muslims and Christians, necessitated the need to find a special committee that works to improve the relationship between Muslims and Christians in order to consolidate the bonds of peaceful coexistence that was known by traditional religions in the Ivorian region (Lamothe, 1984).

The establishment of this committee is well supported by the Islamic goal of dealing with non-Muslims. Islam establishes a method of inter-cultural dialogue in what is good by prohibiting assaulting members of other religions without a right, as it would help in exchanging opinions and benefiting from sciences, knowledge, and various other aspects between all type of people. It offers opportunity for other religions to adapt Islam by presenting its facts and teaching them of its qualities and virtues, all while adhering to a clear and unambiguous methodology. This also aids in the eradication of extremism and violence, as well as the creation of a space based on mutual respect. It is from this base Muslims are allowed to work alongside Christian in the same committee to promote peace in the country without having any religious or personal barriers

(Marji, 2021). This is so because religious conflict, willful killing, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape, and persecution for political, racial or religious reasons, are inhuman acts prohibited in the Islamic perspective. For this reason, Islam allows Muslims to peacefully collaborate and dialogue with non-Muslims (Abbasi, 2020).

Despite the fact that Christians had more opportunities and support in the post-independence period; However, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's policy and initiatives towards religions have been useful support to both Muslims and Christians. This indicated the coexistence between Islam and Christianity remarkable stability and reassurance, in addition to the constant call for peace that accompanied this political system, whether inside or outside the state. Rather, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny always made clear to the citizens that progress and prosperity could not be achieved in the absence of security and stability, while security and stability were associated with peace, cooperation and good understanding among members of society. Based on that he used to say: "Peace is not just words, but a character" (Lamothe, 1984).

So, during the days of President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the Islamic-Christian relations experienced commendable changes in some aspects, where he made efforts to alert the consciences of religious officials - especially Muslims and Christians - that despite their differences, they were compelled to live in peace side by side within the same homeland, and the common interest between them required cooperation and concerted efforts in serving the nation to which they all belong, as the stability and progress of the state depended on their stability, transcendence of historical tragedies between them, and good management of their differences. Accordingly, rapprochement and tolerance continued to take over disharmony, hatred and states of caution instilled by the policy of colonialism between Muslims and Christians. That rapprochement contributed in the creation of intimacy, respect and mutual trust among them, which promoted peace and tolerance among religions in that period, so that you find in one family Muslims and Christians who respect each other's beliefs and cooperate with each other in social and racial matters, and they persevered in that peaceful interaction until the death of the father of nation President Felix Houphouët-Boigny (Gaulme, 2001).

Immediately after the death of President Houphouët; Political differences began to fall on the land of Ivory Coast, these political situations have undergone many transformations, sometimes turning into tribal, ethnic, and sometimes religious issues. Those who have been the cause for that political confusion after the death of the first President Houphouët which started from racism problem and to religion matter were: president Henri Konan Bedie, Robert Guei, Laurent Gbagbo and his Highness Hassan Ouattara, the current President of the country. This resulted to violations after the peaceful coexistence established by President Houphouët among religions, tribes and political communities, and turned into a complex coexistence that led to the bloodshed of the population from all sides. Furthermore, in the presidency of Laurent Gbagbo, the political crises and tragedies that led to the dispersal of the unity between population and the sabotage of peaceful coexistence among society accumulated more than it was before (Thomas, 2011).

When Ouattara became President in 2011, the fire of war and clashes subsided, and life began to take its good side, as soon as President Ouattara took control of the country, he called for reform and reconciliation between the Ivorian and foreign communities residing in the Ivorian territory, as he formed a team in the regions of the country to call for tolerance headed by Charles Konan Banny with the participation of religion' scholars, traditional chiefs and tribes in the country, and also a group of comedians, singers and all popular person. Praise be to God, the president was able to consolidate security and stability in all regions, and improve the economy. He was also able to fight all kinds of corruption and to motivate young people to work and renounce laziness. (Miran, 2018).

The president was also able to impose entente, tolerance, respect of principles between religions and population. That great job of him was reflected on religious leaders during elections in 2020 where religious leaders prevented the community of both side – Muslim and Non-Muslim – for performing and act which can lead to inter-religious quarrels in favor of any politician. Since then, the reality of Muslims and Christian coexistence under the regime of President Ouattara since 2011, after the electoral crisis, until now, 2021, has turned to a peaceful coexistence and best condition among the all communities (Miran, 2018).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept to introduce peaceful coexistence among both religions in Ivory Coast was essential in this study. The

constitution was applied by the researchers to promote religions' equality in the country. The conflict between the two religions had a long history before she got her independence in 1960. To establish peace and stability in the country, the constitution was amended in order to have peaceful coexistence in Ivory coast. The framework was then revised in August 2000 in order to reinforce peaceful coexistence among religions in Ivory coast (Marain, 2014). It has declared the republic as a democratic country and recognized religious freedom and free exercise for all citizens. The constitution is the fundamental principle which can be used as an indicator to evaluate justice between the both religions in a good governance system in Ivory Coast. It can also be better technique and structure to fight religious racism among the both communities in developing nations, particularly in Ivory Coast due to the county status concerning past events.

To maintain the objective of this study, Religion diversity, equality and promoting peace, are the three fundamental principles chosen by the researcher to strengthen the Ivorian constitution in maintaining the objective of the study.

The conceptual framework of the research is about contemporary Muslim and Christian interaction in Man, Ivory Coast. The researchers wish to reconsider the role of religion in eradicating violent and social Hatteras – and in doing so, it contributes to the coexistence maintenance and socio-political transformation of Ivorian societies by using the Ivorian constitution through applying three main principles method; religion diversity, equality, peace promotion (Obaji & Swart, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Participant's selection**

The participants chosen for this study were 1) two imams, 2) pastors, and 2) community chairpersons. In order to gain concrete information to address research objectives, "purposive sampling" (Cohen et al., 2014) was the main strategy used to choose participants in research. The participants were selected base on their experience in the reality of Islam Christian in Man, Côte d'Ivoire.

#### **Instruments and analytical procedure.**

Using a qualitative method, a semi-structured interview was adopted for data collection in this study. This instrument is suitable in providing rich insights into people's views on particular issues (Creswell, 2007; Ambele & Watson, 2018). Following ethical procedures, the participants in this study were individually contacted in their various arena for consent approval to participate in the research. The participants were each interviewed on a day and time convenient for them. Each interview lasted for about two hours and was conducted in French then later translated to English. The interview sessions were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The audio recordings from the interviews were first used to evaluate the information and then saved in Microsoft word. Since the main focus of this study was the contents of the responses of the participants and not the manner in which they gave the information, there was no transcription of any prosodic features that occurred in the interviews.

The interviews were transcribed closely and translated into English. After that, all transcriptions were read, re-read and checked intensively, line by line, through description. The researchers then started to define emerging themes or trends appropriate to the study by reading from beginning to end over and over again throughout the transcriptions. In this study, a 'bottom-up coding or inductive approach' technique in which coding arises from the information was adopted (Cresswell, 2007; Ambele & Watson, 2018). The emerging themes were edited, reorganized and grouped together for consistency in separate sets of classifications as quickly as the coding was completed to show how they were interrelated. Some themes were structured into sub-theme classifications, discarding those irrelevant to the present research.

### **RESULTS**

From the literature review, it can be concluded that the nature of both religions' past through various stages in Ivory Coast can be summarized into two categories: The era of conflict and the era of peaceful coexistence. However, the peaceful period between members of both religions was more than the conflict. In fact, all that information is a reflection from past history, consequently, in this research the researchers try to clarify the current interaction between communities of both religions through interviewing the members of both communities, emphasizing on the current situation in the country, especially Man.

This section of the research presents the results from the participants perspective. The respondents were imams, pastors and community leaders. The response was classified into themes below.

### **The entry of Islam into Côte d'Ivoire**

The arrival of Islam in Côte d'Ivoire is a concern that needs reflection to the true history. Many scholars have written different views on this matter. In this regard, the researchers see it necessary to interview religion leaders in Man. According to the participants' perspective, (See excerpt 1 and 2).

#### *Excerpt 1.*

Actually, according to some books that we read in school and what we heard from our teachers who came before us, Ivorian people have been connected with Islamic religion through their good relationship with Arab traders from Arabic countries such as; Egypt, Morocco, Algeria etc. They used to come for business in this country and as a result, some of them migrated here and became citizens.

#### *Excerpt 2.*

You know and most people know that Islam came to Africa since the time of prophet Muhammed (saw). Specifically, Islam came to ivory coast through delivering the message of Allah (*Dawa*). This is the history of the arrival of Islam in this country.

Based on the responses in expert 1 and 2, it is now known that the coming of Islam to ivory coast can be categorized into two aspects; *Dawa* and Trade. Various sayings have been reported by historians and those interested in African studies about the arrival of Islam in Ivory Coast and it's spread among the public. But what is proven by the researchers is that historians such as Ismail Ahmed Yaghi and Mahmoud Shakir argued that Islam reached Côte d'Ivoire in the fifth century through the mediation of da'wah and merchants, not through conquests and war (Touré, 2019).

### **The Arrival of Christianity in Côte d'Ivoire**

It is essential to understand the coming of Christian in Côte D'Ivoire. The Catholic missionaries are considered the earliest churches to appear in the territory of Côte d'Ivoire, and their entry went through two main phases: Adventurous missionary's stage and Stage of official missionaries. The participants' views are mentioned in expert 3 and 4, respectively.

#### *Excerpt 3*

The coming of Christianity religion to this country resulted from the French colonial who came to Ivory Coast to evangelize in all the villages including Man, in Côte D'Ivoire. They built hospitals and schools to educate the citizens and converted them to Christianity. From this point, Christianity began to spread in the country. This is how Christianity came to the country.

Other researchers give similar views as participants on how Christianity came to Côte D'Ivoire. In 1687, five monks from Portugal arrived at the shores of "Assini" in Côte d'Ivoire, intending to convert the people of the region. They tried to enter the interior, but three of them died at once, and two returned to Portugal, where the campaign was completely disappointing. Two years later, the parents: P. Gonzalez and P. Cerizier arrived in the village of Asini, and met strong resistance from the people, Likewise, the hostility of the Dutch was intense against those who deal with the French, and there the father Cerezé died, and the other went to Benin (Désalmand, 1984).

After the country was occupied by French colonialism, Binger was appointed as its governor, In the year 1895, he addressed a letter to Father Blanc, president of the Association of African Missions in Lyon, France (Société des missions de Lyon), in that letter he asked to send a Catholic missionary in order to evangelize and educate under the protection of the colonial administration. Responding to the request, Côte d'Ivoire was designated an independent Episcopal Province in June 1895. In October, the leader of the new missionary group, Father P. Hamard and Father P. Bonhomme, arrived in Gran Bassam (P. Désalmand 1984). After the arrival of those two Catholic missionaries, the agreement between them was that the colonial administration pays one hundred and fifty cfa per month for one person, including school, housing, and for administration (Désalmand, 1984).

This was how Christianity entered the land of Côte d'Ivoire and from this history it can be understood that Islam and Christianity are not original religions adapted by Ivoirian people, who were instead pagans and follow the traditions of their ancestors.



### **Current Interaction between Muslims and Christians**

This section of the research presents the participants' perspective on the current interaction between Muslims and Christians. The participants' views are illustrated below (see excerpt 4-5).

#### *Excerpt 4*

The Muslims and Christians interrelationship in Ivory Coast nowadays is better than ever before, and it continues to improve greatly day by day. Such a smooth atmosphere among religious people was made possible by his Excellency president Alassane Ouattara, since his ascendance to power in 2011. Through his wisdom, he established a truth and reconciliation committee composed of both Christians and Muslims to highlight different religious and social problems that had destroyed the peace and stability of the country, orchestrated by his predecessors for their political interests.

#### *Excerpt 5*

The interaction between Muslims and Christians in our opinion is something normal and important to bring peace and well-being in our society, that was the teaching of beloved prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him), who lived with Christians and Jewish and Medina without any problem, while respecting our doctrines

From the excerpt 4 -5 the current interaction between religious communities is going well since president Alassane Ouattara took office in 2011. (Miran, 2018) argued that president Alassane Ouattara called for reform and reconciliation between the Ivorians and foreign communities residing in the Ivorian territory, as he formed a team in the regions of the country to call for tolerance headed by Charles Konan Banny with the participation of religion' scholars, traditional chiefs and tribes in the country, and also a group of comedians, singers and all entertainers. For his good leadership ability, the president was able to consolidate security and stability in all regions and improve the economy. He was also able to fight all kinds of corruption and motivated young people to work and renounce laziness.

### **Current Social activities between Muslims and Christians**

As discussed in the previous theme above, there is a peaceful coexistence between the both religious in the country. This section illustrates the current social activities between Muslims and Christians in the country.

#### *Excerpt 6*

The social coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Ivorian society has been cordial since 2011. It was the result of many efforts and reforms made by the government to maintain the country's stability. Example: -restoring good working relationships based on trust and confidence in the country. Equal right and equal treatment for every one regardless of your gender, religion or tribe. Strict laws on any form of discrimination, social, religious or tribal. These measures have contributed immensely to harmonizing Ivorian society and boosted the climate of interaction, and also improved the living conditions of the people.

#### *Excerpt 7*

Nowadays, especially in Ivory Coast we live together and we share everything, especially. In a country where Christians participate in our social celebrations like weddings and funerals, as well as we participate in the same activities from their side.

Excerpt 6 and 7 indicate that both religions are sharing similar activities together such as wedding, funeral, religious festival and trading together. Miran (2000) explored good relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. She further indicated that during the festival of Muslims, some non-Muslims participate by giving gifts on *Eid Fitr* and slaughtering cows or sheep on *Eid-Adha*. Some non-Muslims adopted Muslim names for their children such as Mohamed, Fatimah, Mariam, Abubakar, Ibrahim etc. without being a Muslim. Non-Muslims also provide food such as sugar to their neighboring Muslim sisters and brothers in the community. On the other hand, Muslims also shared similar action towards non-Muslim.

From the perspective views and Miran (2000) explanation, it is clearly understood that both Muslims and Christians are sharing good social activities and living in a peaceful coexistence in the country.

### **Government Favorite religion in the Country**

This study deems it necessary to investigate participants about the most favorite religion by the government in Ivory

Coast. The participants' perspectives are mentioned in excerpt 8 and 9 respectively.

*Excerpt 8*

As we know that religion in Ivory Coast is varied. The Muslims, mainly sunit, represent 37.2%. While Christians, composed of catholic and evangelicals represent 44% of the total population, the rest of population 19% are traditional or non-religion people. Meanwhile, Christians are the majority in terms of religion, but Muslims are more influential in the country, because the rest of the 19 % always follow Muslims.

*Excerpt 9*

In my own view of understanding, I can say Christianity because they occupied the best positions in the country. Even now, the current president is a Muslim but the most decision-makers favor the Christianity religion as Islamic certificate is not recognized yet in the country.

Similar views were presented by Jeune Afrique (1988) that the former president His Excellency Félix Houphouët-Boigny brought some diversity between the Muslim and Christians by favoring the Christians religion. He once said that, there are ten million people, 23% of whom are Muslims, and 15% of them are Catholics... definitely, Islam is an attack and it must be stopped, so he built the biggest church at that time named "Basilisk" in order to dominate the Islamic religion in Ivory Coast.

The statement from His Excellency Félix Houphouët-Boigny infuriated the citizens, especially the Muslims. To correct his error, he began to build Mosques in the country such as central mosque of Abidjan and many cities inside the country, including the Great Mosque in the "Ajame" neighborhood in Abidjan, the grand Mosque of Yamoussoukro, the grand Mosque of Korogo city, as well as in the city of Bouake, Bonduko, and others regions (Kone, 2014).

Based on the above views, it is now known that Islam is the most influential religion in the society. However, Christianity is the most favorite religion in the country by the government. Regardless of the favoritism, the both religion adherents still live-in peace and harmony in the country. It has been proved by Miran (2000) that both religions are in good relationship.

**Main Reason of Peaceful Coexistence between Muslim and Christian**

In this section, the researchers investigate the main reason for peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Ivory Coast. The responses from the participants are illustrated below (see excerpt 10-11).

*Excerpt 10*

The essential reasons for peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Ivory coast in particular and the world in general, are: equality and strong laws on discrimination. - equal rights and equal treatment for every one everywhere in everything. And banning any form of discrimination in our societies, social, religious, racial political and tribal.

*Excerpt 11*

The main reason for peaceful coexistence between them is as follows: Firstly, all the religions talk about peace. So according to the different doctrines, peace is an important element which allows us to practice our religion..... To add, when there's trouble in the society, no one can be the winner. Secondly, all religions believe that aggression towards other people is forbidden. We just need to be patriots. We need to obey God. Thirdly, coexistence between different religions allows us to discover what the real religion of the other side is. Brother..... briefly, these are some lines that I can put here.

From the participants' points of views, the main reasons for peaceful coexistence between the both religions are based on the constitution which promotes tolerance, mutual respect and religious doctrine. The Ivorian constitution 2016 gives right to every religion in the country. The constitution proclaims that: "1) the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire is one indivisible country, secular, democratic and social, which ensures equality for all before the law without racial, ethnic, tribal, sexual or religious discrimination, and it respects all beliefs, 2) The people of Côte d'Ivoire should be aware of their freedom, national character, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and they are aware that union in light of this diversity guarantees economic development and a good social condition, 3) Any propaganda that aims or feels the elevation of one social sect over another is prohibited.

Due to the enforcement of these laws, the country has experienced a peaceful coexistence among its citizens. In addition to those laws, Islamic religion, also conserves the principle through calling all Muslims to justice toward all humans as the Quran stated: (O you who believe, warning: stand firm for God, witnesses with equity, and let not hatred of a people above

you, that you act not equitably; do justice — that is nearer to prudent fear. And be in prudent fear of God; God is aware of what you do). (*Surat al mā'idah*, 8).

On the other hand, John 14:27 states: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you, I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid". This analogy is to indicate that Religions are the best solution to solving problems and spreading the message of peace, as long as they are properly understood.

Furthermore, the basis for the success of societies lies in accepting coexistence regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation, because difference is the nature of human beings, and to the extent that coexistence is a feature of society, a vital ingredient for the society to be considered civilized. Peaceful coexistence transforms society from conflict to stability and harmony, which strengthens creativity and increases human energies, and encourages development and prosperity (Al-Neimat, 2021).

The purpose of coexistence is respecting human sanctity, striving on earth for good, security and peace, and combating atheism, vice, corruption, injustice and tyranny. And calling people to the values of love, tolerance and human brotherhood. This is the goal of Islamic law, and this purpose has been achieved in the Ivorian interreligious society, and it must be preserved. (Biwasf, 2018).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

For so long the religious leaders of Republic of Côte d'Ivoire have been manipulated by politicians due to their own interest and not for nation benefits, which led the community to face conflict between religions in the country, and that was the main causes of 2002 civil war in Ivorian territory between President Laurent Gbagbo as a Christians candidate and President Hassan Ouattara as Muslims candidate of the country, resulted as an aversive consequence, for such an unnecessary division between the citizens of the nation.

The findings of this study indicate that both Islamic and Christian religions are living in a peaceful society in Ivory Coast. Mutual understanding of both religions has implications on their peaceful coexistence. The Ivorian constitution has also hugely and positively impacted the said peaceful coexistence among the citizens. Although the Islamic religion has huge influences in the society, Christianity is the most favorable religion in the country. Based on the peaceful coexistence between the both religions, the researchers outline the following recommendations to keep that strong relationship.

1. Governments and religious authorities have the responsibility to restore peace and stability in the countries and societies, by putting rules and regulations in place to protect and control each and every one regardless of his or their social status, or religious affiliation. Also, to ban all kinds of discrimination in the society.
2. Muslims and Christians have to love each other and promote religious tolerance in the societies to allow our children to grow up and live together in peace, tolerance, mutual respect and harmony.
3. Respect for every religion and avoid creating unnecessary conflicts in our communities, and accept each other with our religious and social diversity to live happily and prepare better heritage for our unborn generations.
4. All Ivorians should think and consider each other as a unique member of one land, one country, with common interest in the society, regardless of tribes, languages and religions, and should also think that those diversities of tribes, languages and religions show the beauty of the country and its development.
5. The religious and traditional leaders of all tribes must help and contribute in social development by promoting peace among the people of their communities, because no development can be achieved in any society without peaceful coexistence as the first president said: "Peace is not just words, but a comportment".
6. The study recommends the Ivorian Islamic scholars and researchers to do more research concerning the religion's reality before and nowadays, in order that the future generation can learn from it and avoid violent, unnecessary conflict and racisms among them. We learn from reviewing the previous history to re-build a better future.
7. Government and Religious leaders need to create more awareness in order to educate the citizens about the importance of peaceful coexistence among the citizens and educate them to warn them about the danger of conflict.

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